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ABSTRACT

The call for greater diversity among college faculty and administrators is a prominent feature in the literature of higher education and especially of community colleges. For faculty members and administrators who may be the only, or the first, or even the token minority within their division, it is important to resolve what being the "only one" means and what opportunities it represents. Interviews with five African Americans, two Hispanics, one Native American, one Asian, two physically handicapped, and one female vocational education instructor, each identified as the "only ones" in their academic departments, combined with a review of the literature, helped to identify a number of issues that were common in the experiences of the "only ones." These issues include: (1) the comments or behavior of these individuals tended to be enlarged and generalized to the groups they represented, often leading to overachieving behavior; (2) the individuals often experienced social and professional isolation, often leading to feelings of loneliness; (3) they often encountered false assumptions and stereotypes, including prejudice and lack of professional respect or advancement from peers; (4) the individuals were expected to serve on multiple committees within their division to represent a minority perspective, and were also expected to serve as community leaders for their particular minority group; and (5) white and male privilege, the tyranny of the majority, racism, and biases were an accepted, if unrecognized norm. Among those interviewed, professional acknowledgement and respect, acknowledgement of individual uniqueness, recognition and utilization of expertise, professional trust, honest evaluations, and inclusion in collegial networks were identified as elements of the preferred professional environment. (PAA)

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WORKING WITH THE "ONLY ONE" IN THE DIVISION

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WORKING WITH THE "ONLY ONE" IN THE DIVISION

Betty B. Jones, Ph.D.

> "We need to keep on working with difference in higher education until difference doesn't make any difference any more."
> -- Johnetta Cole, Keynote at 1991 AAHE Conference

One is a lonely number. By definition "one" represents a single entity which stands alone. However, "one" also has unparalleled conceptual features and potential which make it important as "first", "unique" and "only". In this sense "only one" may represent the basic unit in a new social and professional paradigm.

This paper will address important questions which are often obscured or overlooked in the literature of higher education. Much of this literature represents "the only one" in the negative contexts of tokenism, outsiders, general otherness and the kind of alienation which comes from a sense of "not belonging", i.e.,

> **"Being the other is feeling different, is awareness of being distinct, is consciousness of being dissimilar. It means being outside the game, outside the circle, outside the set... Otherness results in feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned. It produces a sense of isolation, of apartness, of disconnectedness, of alienation (Madrid 1988 p. 2).**[1]

However, in the community college, success in working with the "only" may represent a critical item on the agenda for diversity. Does **being the "only one"** necessarily lead to being an outsider? Is **having an "only one"** in the division an irresolvable problem or a unique opportunity? This paper will analyze the issues involved and suggest a different perspective on the group profile of "O" (Only One), and the academic leadership necessary to involve "O"s as contributing members in shaping collegial life within the division.

THE IMPORTANCE OF "O" IN THE DIVISION

The call for greater diversity among faculty and administrative staff in higher education is a prominent feature in the literature of higher education and especially in the community colleges. For years, research has forecast the increased diversity among college students as a result of changing demographics and other societal shifts (Hodgkinson 1985). Today, diversity in the student

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[1] Cited in Smith, Daryl G. The Challenge of Diversity: Involvement or Alienation in the Academy?. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 5, 1989.

population is a visible characteristic of public institutions in higher education. However, this is especially true in the community colleges, where recent reports document the trend of growing enrollment of non-traditional students including adult learners, ethnic minorities and differently abled students. In addition, most community colleges report rising enrollments of women who seek equal educational opportunity for career entry to technological and other fields previously limited to males.

In reviewing the performance of higher education in achieving systems of open access to diverse groups, Daryl Smith documents that the proportion of African-American and Latino young adults who are currently going on to college has declined in the 1980's and that while absolute numbers have grown, these groups are severely under-represented in higher education (Smith 1989 p. 9). At the same time, Smith observes that "the theme of alienation is a powerful voice in the literature concerning racial and ethnic minorities" . . . in higher education (Smith 1989 p. 1).

Alienation **is** a common theme in the literature on racial and ethnic minorities in higher education (Anderson 1987; Armstrong-West 1988); and "chilly climate" is frequently used to describe the treatment of women and minorities in higher education (Sandler and Hall 1987). These themes suggest the need for higher education to develop institutional goals and departmental strategies to improve the collegiate experience for faculty and students. In fact, creating an accepting climate which encourages students to succeed, is directly linked to institutional success in recruiting and retaining faculty who model the potential futures of these groups, and who can assist their institutions to improve the achievement and graduation rates of students from diverse groups.[2]

While "O" may be the ONLY ONE, the FIRST ONE, and perhaps even the TOKEN ONE, a more important issue is what "O" represents. Will "O" become committed and involved in helping the division achieve diversity? Will others of different backgrounds be attracted to the division and involved in its work? Will the division be strengthened in its capacity to appreciate and utilize diversity to achieve excellence in teaching and student learning? The answers to these questions will be dependent on the direction and content of academic leadership within the division.

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[2] Blackwell, J. Mainstreaming Outsiders. p. 64-65. This analysis presents statistical evidence which shows that "number of black faculty" in the professional school is the most powerful predictor of first year enrollment and success of black students in professional schools. The persistence of this variable as the most powerful predictor suggests that institutions seriously committed to improving the enrollment and retention of black students in professional schools should hire and retain more black faculty.

ISSUES FOR THE "ONLY ONE"

The major issues for "O", which are discussed here, have been framed as a result of literature review and through interviews with twelve (12) faculty identified as "O"s in their department. Those interviewed include ethnic minorities, i.e., African-American, Hispanic, Native-American and Asian, women, and handicapped persons, i.e., deaf and physically handicapped.[3] A major issue of common interest to "O"s as teaching professionals is "how can I contribute to the division as a colleague in a climate of professional respect and appreciation?". In the interviews, I was interested in what local barriers to the collegial experience were perceived by "O"s, and what they would find helpful in overcoming these barriers?

While there are important differences among "O"s in history, personal issues and experiences, the literature identifies some issues which appear to be universal among the "first" or "token" members of a professional group. Most frequently mentioned in the literature are issues of isolation, surplus visibility, false assumptions and stereotypes, pressures to over-achieve, multiple demands of location, and the tyranny of the majority in decisions. This paper selects five major issues for discussion. These issues derive from the special status of being an "O" among "X"s are frequently mentioned in the literature, and/or received comment from the local sample of "O"s interviewed on this subject.

1. Issues of Surplus Visibility. Kanter (1977) discusses the ways in which varied proportions of group representation can shape intergroup relations, with a special focus on the significance of being "the only one" or a token member of a visible minority. Groups of individuals who are represented in proportions smaller than 20 percent of a population are subject to increased visibility, scrutiny and pressures which can result in poor performance and social/psychological stress.

   The phenomena of surplus visibility is described by Patai as the "shift in public perceptions which occurs as traditionally powerless and marginalized groups enter higher education and challenge the expectation that they should be invisible and silent. For those who have long been in positions of dominance, any space that minorities occupy appears excessive and the voices they raise sound loud and offensive" (Patai, 1991). Consequently, a black, a woman, a homosexual or any member of a group seen as different from the norm in a given setting is viewed as a "token" of that group, rarely as an individual. These individuals are forced to choose between **invisibility** (self denial) or **surplus visibility** in which their comments or behavior are enlarged and generalized to the group they represent.

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[3] Faculty interviewed include nine (9) ethnic minorities, i.e., five (5) African-Americans, two (2) Hispanics, one (1) Native-American, one (1) Asian-American; two (2) physically handicapped, one (1) woman in Vocational/ Technical Education).

Surplus visibility places the "only one" under constant scrutiny and informal evaluation by his/her peers. Whatever "O"s do is immediately made visible, identified, talked about and interpreted by the standards of the majority. Such visibility keeps "O"s on constant guard with a need to prove to others that they are "all right". "O"s who were interviewed referred to this phenomena as an uncomfortable self-consciousness among their peers, and a sensitivity to how they are viewed in the conversations among the "X"s in their division. They believe that their professional image and reputation can be destroyed by irresponsible comments made in jest and that their professional status does not receive due respect. For example, Sandler observes that women in traditionally male fields are vulnerable to direct/indirect sexist disparagement or ridicule of their abilities by male faculty and students (Sandler, 1986 p. 15). Worse yet, "O"s are subject to the negative memories of earlier failures in the department, i.e., "we once had a (you name it, i.e., woman, black, Hispanic, homosexual) in this department and it didn't work out, so we are very reluctant about hiring another one."

As a result of surplus visibility, many "O"s adopt the "Super O" syndrome. They become "overachievers" vulnerable to the pressures of personal and professional overextension. Such overachievement in "O" quickly becomes a matter of expectation, and according to the "O"s interviewed by this author, it is seldom recognized or rewarded by the division or the institution.

What strategies may be used to involve "O"s in the collegial work of the division with fairness, equity, respect and appreciation for their individual talents, diverse perspectives and professional expertise? Can high visibility result in positive outcomes?

2. Issues of Social and Professional Isolation. These issues are frequent as a result of being "the Only One of a Kind" in a structure of other identities and social patterns. To be an "O" among "X"s, where X is the majority, is to feel emotional displacement and lack of accessible support. Faculty report perceptions of isolation from networks of support and being left "out of the loop" of informal information and discussions. This means that ethnic minorities and women have less access to communication and feedback and to informal channels of information about institution-wide issues, problems, challenges, directions and politics.

Professional isolation poses high risks in a collegial system where faculty are expected to work together and share resources on teaching and curriculum issues. Sandler makes the observation that men are less likely to collaborate with women in an all male department (Sandler, B. 1986). Similarly in interviews with African-American "O"s, they mentioned the reluctance of White colleagues to join with them in cooperative projects.

According to Sandler's research, "isolation leads to feelings of loneliness, to the persistent awareness of not 'fitting in', to always being on guard and to the fatigue that comes from always having to be one's own support system" (Sandler, B. 1991). Interviews conducted by this author also suggest an "isolation of the spirit". A woman located in an all male department talked about feelings of discomfort and disconnectedness which led to pervasive uncertainties and lowered self-confidence. In many cases, this is related to a group style and language which creates a protective support for the "in group", i.e., men, while leaving the lone woman out even when she may be physically present. Hispanic "O"s mentioned their "loneliness for the language" as a means of expressing strong feelings. And, African-American O's talked about the frustration of trying to actualize diversity in a system which affirms it in concept but rejects it in action. How does an "O" actualize the institutional mission and help others like "self" when this is not valued behavior within the division?

3. False Assumptions and Stereotypes. Frequent comment on the problems of prejudice and misperceptions based on stereotypes is found in the literature of higher education. However, the insights gained as a result of individual interviews with "O"s offer a unique qualitative view not often found in written form.

One of the most offensive assumptions identified by "O"s is the assumption by colleagues that they are **not qualified for their position**. "They believe that you received special considerations and that you are not **really** qualified for the position you have" (Black male) . . . "there's always a constant need to prove yourself in performance. You are really compelled to overachieve because you know they are looking for you to fail" (Black female). . . "There is lack of respect for your professional expertise; they try to depreciate what you have to offer" (Hispanic female) . . . "The men faculty are more likely to be collegial with male students than with me. They ask questions like - can you handle this? Women are not usually good at this" (White female) . . . "They seem to think that because you are deaf you are also dumb! I think they discount me because I have a handicap and they think I get special privileges" (Deaf female).

A close second, which is a source of much frustration and resentment among "O"s, is prejudice in the peer evaluation of performance and readiness for promotion. "Professional advancement is slower for ethnic minorities. You work your buns off for a long time without credit or recognition" (Hispanic male) . . ."You are not treated as a valued member of the discipline. There is very slow professional advancement" (Black female) . . . Your opportunities have unfair limitations applied and controlled by others" (Black male) . . . "I resent the constant reminder of who I am and all the assumptions" (Black female).

False assumptions regarding professional and community relationships are also a source of irritation. "You are really self conscious about meeting or talking with other Black faculty. They assume it is socializing rather than consulting or some other professional relationship" (Black female) . . ."The faculty in my department are not real comfortable with me. They don't know anything about deaf culture and are less interested in learning. They speak, smile and avoid me when they can" (Deaf woman) . . . "Community service is encouraged by the college, and is recognized in positive ways in most divisions. But my service in the Black community is seen as social rather than service. It is very unfair" (Black female).

4. Multiple Demands of Structural Location. Being the "Only One of a Kind" in a majority of others exposes "O" to multiple demands from many sources. Some of these demands occur within the division and are over and above the expectations of majority faculty. For example, "O"s serve on multiple committees to represent a minority perspective in programs, serve as consultant to faculty and administrative staff on minority problems and concerns, and serve as general "window dressing" when needed to draw attention to the college "commitment to diversity".

   In addition to internal expectations, "O"s belong to a community of those with similar characteristics, experiences and background who constitute a reference group for their identity and support. This community also has expectations of "O" which derive from his/her professional position and location in an institution of higher education. "O"s serve as community leaders, board members, advisers, mentors and contributors within and on behalf of these groups. Commitment to community service is demanding. Modeling and guiding young people toward greater aspirations and interest in college is a compelling personal mission and community expectation.

   Most of the "O"s interviewed demonstrate commitment to their community of reference as well as to the college and the broader community. These commitments represent access to diverse community networks which can strengthen the college in its assessment of community needs and gaining community support. How can this access be shared in the division?

5. White and Male Privilege and the Tyranny of the Majority. Peggy McIntosh has written an illuminating paper which discusses male and white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets" which are cashed in each day, and which most whites and males take for granted (McIntosh 1988). "White privilege is like a weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank checks." It is unearned, and it gives the holder a distinct advantage to oppress or ignore those who do not have it. These privileges operate on assumptions of righteous tradition which frame the questions and make the rules.

The view of white/male privilege was identified in the interviews of local "O"s as the "operational norms of racism". When individuals were asked "what is it like to be an "O", and what do you find most difficult or resentful in your situation?" their comments were oriented to a common theme, i.e., "You constantly see the double standard in operation. Yet, they refuse to recognize that many of the standard procedures are prejudicial or biased . . . a lot of their cherished traditions are very biased . . . these guys practice racism as if it is normal! They do not see themselves as practicing racists, and get upset when you name it or call their attention to it."

While traditions of privilege are a source of comfort, safety, power and leadership for the majority, they often constitute a source of frustration and inequity to the minority. Unawareness of the experience of being an "O" leads to insensitivity and over-reliance on procedures. Chairs need to develop better people skills and skills for understanding and dealing with differences among the faculty.

THE EXPERIENCE OF "X" - WHERE X = MAJORITY

Very little is written about the way in which "X"s experience diversity. However, the desire of this group for continuity of comfortable habits of mind, social networks, power and privilege is not surprising. To the extent that new norms of diversity constitute a disruption of such patterns and create a need to learn new skills, "X"s are likely to demonstrate apprehension, anxiety and/or resistance (Anderson 1988, p. 264). Many "X"s also perceive the token introduction of "O"s as a loss of standards. How can institutions create incentive for change and motive for new learning?

The challenge to "X"s is to learn more about diverse groups and to seriously embrace the norms of professional respect, team building and collegiality. The rewards will be found in the discovery of a new pool of personal and professional knowledge and skill, personal and professional revitalization, increased access and sensitivity to diverse students, greater motive and learning support for student achievement, and expanded access to multiple community networks for learning and support. The discovery and appreciation of multicultural community represents a worthy challenge, beginning with "O".

ISSUES OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP -- NURTURING "O" AS A RESOURCE IN THE SEARCH FOR DIVERSITY

> "There is a gift that 'outsiders' often bring to an institution. They are like the little boy in the tale of *The Emperor's New Clothes* who was the only one who noticed that the emperor was naked. Women and minorities, precisely because they are outsiders, often bring a fresh point of view to the institution, seeing it with different eyes and coming up with new ideas. If we do not have a supportive environment for them, we waste talent and ultimately the academy is the loser" (Sandler and Hall, p. 17).

A key question of leadership is how do we nurture and utilize the perspectives and talents of the "O"s in our divisions? And, how do we involve "O"s as contributing members in shaping collegial life within the division?

The nurture of "O"s is most effectively undertaken within the framework of faculty development. When "O"s were asked (See Footnote 3) "how would you like your supervisor (and peers) to work with you? What is your preferred relationship?", a strong commonality became apparent in their comments. The desire for **professional acknowledgement and respect** was a primary preference of all "O"s. In addition, the following preferences were consistently mentioned:

* Acknowledgement of individual uniqueness, i.e., not **just** black, handicapped, woman, etc.,
* Recognition, development and utilization of expertise and talents,
* Professional trust--to set goals and complete activities, to do a good job,
* Honest evaluations and feedback with suggestions for improvement,
* Inclusion in information network and collegial networks of communication,
* Acknowledgement and recognition for a good job.

These preferred sensitivities and behaviors mentioned by "O"s are not different from the preferences of majority faculty. They suggest the need for a renewed focus of leadership on the implementation of development processes within the division. In other words, working effectively with "O" means leadership within the division faculty as a group to construct a climate of professional growth and affirmation based on shared professional values and behaviors.

Academic deans and chairs can play an important role in providing leadership which draws attention to the values of diversity and which recognizes and rewards individual faculty who contribute to improving the professional climate for diversity within the division. In addition, chairs can work with the division faculty to identify needs and strategies for development of diversity awareness, and improved skills for active appreciation of diversity in the division and in the classroom. In so doing, a climate will be created by which "O"s can discover a professional role and mission within the academic discipline and make a unique contribution to diversity in the curriculum and to teaching.

The questions which follow present important issues of academic leadership which can make a positive difference in addressing concerns of professional climate and development for "O"s as well as other faculty within the division.

1. How can the chair lead the division toward greater appreciation for diversity and to actively value those who represent this characteristic within the division? What strategies may be used to develop a climate which is accepting and appreciative of differences?

2. How can the chair build an intellectual and collegial community of professionals in the division which encourages and supports professional respect, collaboration and shared resources?

3. How can the chair build a supportive relationship with "O" in the context of the divisional mission and curriculum goals? By what discovery processes can "O" be helped to find an important role and professional mission within the division?

4. How can members of the division be encouraged to provide collegial support and mentoring to "O"?

As academic leader in the division, the chair has a critical role in the professional development of faculty and the collegial climate in which the faculty does its work.[4] However, this assumes that the institution has personnel and instructional policies which guide the recruitment, development and recognition of faculty; and which provide institutional resources in support of these activities.

We believe that the chair, with support from the academic administration, can provide the leadership necessary to involve and integrate "O"s into the work of the division, to avoid alienation and reduce the negative consequences of tokenism; and to increase the positive influence of diversity.

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[4] Allan Tucker presents a strong case in favor of deliberate faculty development initiatives under the leadership of the chair, and a state-of-the-art overview of content and activities (Tucker, 1984 p. 121-140). Tucker also proposes a model for assessing faculty readiness for involvement (p. 137).

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